

Review of Allotments in Hastings and St Leonards

Background

Hastings Borough Council Corporate Plan Target 2011-14 states:

Work with allotment associations to ensure that plots are fully cultivated and that management responsibilities are handed over to the associations wherever feasible.

How do we do this?

- *Publish a set of Allotment Rules with a new Tenancy Agreement*
- *Review the current rent structure with a view to increasing rents*
- *Assess options for devolved responsibility*

Introduction

The following paper outlines some possible options for devolving allotment responsibility to meet our Corporate Plan Target. The Council has no fixed views and has outlined the options for discussion. All changes to the current procedure will be subject to council approval.

(It is noted that all the options pre-suppose a rise in rents. The amount rents rise to may be determined by the option that best fits the model we require to implement and what functions have to be met by the rental income.)

In addition we may wish to consider implementing a deposit scheme whereby new tenants are asked to deposit a sum of money which can then be returned at the end of their agreement or used either wholly or partly to return a plot to a cultivated condition prior to re-letting.

Possible Options

Option 1 Devolve complete responsibility for all allotment matters to an external organisation

- Include allotment management within the new grounds maintenance contract to be retendered in January
- Transfer to third party such as Voluntary Action of Hastings Trust
- Council would only retain the legal work to evict tenants by use of Notices to Improve (NTI) and notices to Quit (NTQ)

This option will require a possible inclusion into the new Ground Maintenance contract specification when retendered in February 2012 or for discussions to take place with a third party provider.

Option 2 Devolve to a constituted Hastings and St Leonards Allotment Association/Federation

- Association to administer all allotment matters other than the legal work to evict tenants by use of Notices to Improve (NTI) and notices to Quit (NTQ)
- Association retain all the income from tenancies minus an administration charge to be retained by Council
- Income could allow potential to create a part time post by the Association

This option requires a fully functioning strategic Federation with employment responsibilities.

Option 3 Devolve responsibility to Sites

- Requires sites to be fully constituted and roles of Secretaries to be clarified
- Sites to retain rental income
- Smaller sites may have to become responsibility of larger sites
- Annual reports to Council
- Council retains the legal work to evict tenants by use of Notices to Improve (NTI) and notices to Quit (NTQ)

This option requires clarity of roles for site secretaries and for sites to be conjoined into associations.

Option 4 Partnership Approach

- Council retains administrative function for letting and data base as well as the legal work to evict tenants by use of Notices to Improve (NTI) and notices to Quit (NTQ)
- Council retains a proportion of income from rents to cover this service
- Sites/Federation retain remaining rental income for devolved work on sites
- Sites Secretaries roles require clarity
- Annual audit of accounts by council

This option will require the council and a strategic federation/association to work closely to devolve responsibilities for site works and improvements to the Federation/Sites and the Council to retain the allotment database. Increased rental income would be divided between the council's costs for administering the database and devolved to the sites or a strategic body for maintenance and improvements.